Front cover: Four figural sculptures sit at the base of the Capitol dome in Madison. These figures were created in the 1910s by a group of stonecutters following the designs of sculptor Karl Bitter. Work on the Capitol building, the third built in Madison after fire destroyed the second, was concluded in 1917. A celebration of the Capitol's centennial has been ongoing throughout 2017.  WHI IMAGE ID 9570

Back cover: The statuary group Prosperity and Abundance stands above the Northwest Pavilion of the Capitol. Karl Bitter explained that the statues were not meant to be “an assemblage of art objects,” but “organic parts of the structure.” The groups, which have stood for over 100 years, underwent cleaning and repair during the Capitol restoration project from 1993 to 2001.  KATHLEEN SITTER
Fellow Wisconsinites,

We are working and winning for Wisconsin.

Since 2011, we have put in place bold, commonsense, conservative reforms to make our state a better place to live, work, and raise a family. The results are impressive.

More people are working today than ever before in our state’s history. Unemployment rates in most counties are the lowest ever. And we are now a Top 10 state for business, up from 41st in 2010, according to Chief Executive Magazine.

Our tax reforms have put billions of dollars back in the hands of the hard-working taxpayers, and Wisconsin is a Top 10 state in reducing the overall tax burden over the previous five years. Our cumulative income tax reductions will save the typical Wisconsin family some $1,500. That’s real money.

We also put in place reforms that helped the government be a better steward of taxpayer money. We have reduced waste, fraud, and abuse in state government, and independent studies show our Act 10 reforms have saved schools and local and state government some $5 billion.

Overall, our reforms brought us here to the point where we have a better budget outlook. It’s what we call the Reform Dividend, and our priorities fall into three categories: Student Success, Accountable Government, and Rewarding Work. Our budget proposal includes major new investments and conservative reforms in each of these areas.

Wisconsin’s future is bright, but we’re not done yet. We are working and winning for Wisconsin.

It is my honor to serve as your governor. I hope the Blue Book is a useful resource for you to learn more about our state government.

Together, we are moving Wisconsin Forward.

Scott Walker
On March 8, 2017, legislative leaders and staff gathered in the Wisconsin Senate Parlor to receive the 2016 Kevin B. Harrington award for Excellence in Democracy Education. The award, presented by the National Conference of State Legislatures, is given to an individual or organization that furthers the understanding of the principles and practices of representative democracy. In presenting the award to the Wisconsin legislature, NCSL highlighted the many civics programs and activities of the Wisconsin legislature, but specifically mentioned one publication that exemplifies the award’s values—the Wisconsin Blue Book.

The Blue Book, published since 1853, may be the oldest publication of the state. It was initially a manual for the Wisconsin State Assembly, a pocket-size volume, under 100 pages, for legislators to have quick access to information about state government. Over the decades, the Blue Book evolved in size, scope, and purpose. The Blue Book’s many iterations were caused by the increased availability of information about state government and by the fact that its audience grew to include all state government and the public. By 2015, the Blue Book was almost 1,000 pages, filled with dense statistical information. It was an almanac of Wisconsin government.

The 2017 Blue Book marks the next iteration in its evolution. The new Blue Book is intended as an introduction to Wisconsin state and local government, but not necessarily as the primary source for this information. We live during a time of unparalleled access to information. More information about state government, and more timely information, can be accessed through the Internet than could ever be assembled in one volume by a team of researchers. The 2017 Blue Book recognizes this fact. The new Blue Book contains biographies of all legislators, descriptions of executive and judicial branch agencies, and vital statistics on Wisconsin government and elections. But it does not reproduce information that is dated or that can be obtained more easily and accurately elsewhere.

Those who have used the Blue Book will appreciate the continuity of the information in the 2017 edition. The topics covered are familiar and much of the statistical information is the same. But there are new discussions about the structure and operation of Wisconsin government, including essays on the legislature and the state budget, public education, and local government. Descriptions of government agencies are shorter than in past editions, but
readers are directed to Internet websites that contain a wealth of information. The key statistical tables are retained, but information peripheral to state and local government is not included. The *Blue Book* is a working document, intended as an introduction for the general public and students of politics to learn about Wisconsin.

The *Blue Book* is authored by Legislative Reference Bureau staff. New data was compiled, new tables assembled, new essays written, and material from past *Blue Books* was reorganized. It was a team undertaking in every way, best exemplified by the researching and writing of the feature article about women in the Wisconsin legislature. In the summer of 2016, LRB staff met with all women legislators, as well as past women legislators, to document their service in the legislature. Interviews were conducted in the capitol building, in legislative district offices, and even in private residences. Much was learned from the interviews and these lessons are captured in the article, “Knocking on the Door: Women in the Wisconsin Legislature.” The article documents women legislators’ campaigns for office, experiences in the legislature, and their challenges and successes. Every reader will appreciate the vital role that women have played in shaping and leading the modern Wisconsin legislature.

The *Blue Book* is a major undertaking that required LRB staff commitment, time, and leadership. Four employees deserve special recognition: Christopher Siciliano, Lauren Jackson, Nancy Warnecke, and Kira Langoussis Mochal. In addition to performing their other legislative duties, they led the project from start to finish. The information assembled in this volume, the visual design of the material, and the recognition of what is required of a hardbound publication in the Internet Age come from their efforts and vision. We are grateful for their contributions.

Richard A. Champagne, Chief
Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau
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